

# **The White Water Shaker Village: On the Periphery of Shakerdom**

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**By**

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## Abstract

Shakers are one of the most researched religious intentional community sects in the Western world. Despite this extensive research and the hundreds of publications, the small community of White Water Shakers in New Haven, Ohio is underrepresented in the literature. This community is on the periphery of Shakerdom yet has much to add to the history of Shakers in America. The analysis of White Water Shaker innovation can shed light on their importance to Shakerism and regional history. This thesis looks at the White Water Shakers in the context of history, business, technology, and architecture as these are categories by which they evolve from standard descriptions of Shakerism.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. for their constant support and energetic aid in the research of my thesis.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michael W. Doyle for advising me on this thesis. Without his patience and genuine interest, I would have never been able to complete a work of this caliber.

## Process Analysis Statement

This thesis focuses on the historic Shaker community of White Water near New Haven, Ohio and its importance to Shakerism as a whole. They were a small, but distinct community in southwestern Ohio whose influence and presence was felt throughout the fledgling American Midwest. I came to know this community at a very young age. The remaining Shaker buildings are near the elementary school, middle school, and high school that I attended in my youth. I drove past these strange dual-entrance, Georgian brick buildings every day for a decade. I was always told they were linked to a Shaker community, but I never knew what that meant until I was well into my teenage years. My fascination with this community was heightened through my introduction to the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. This organization is a nonprofit, volunteer-based group that handles the restoration and conservation of the dwelling and meetinghouse, which are two of dozens of remaining White Water Shaker structures. The amazing people of this organization built on my interests and provided me with every available piece of research on this community. Without them, I would not have a thesis.

There were several challenges in creating this thesis. The number one issue I had in doing research was that there is simply not a lot of specific and/or primary information from this community. The literature on the Shakers, especially those in the eastern United States, is thorough and overwhelming. Despite this extensive and **sometimes exhaustive literature on Shakerism's entirety, the information on White** Water exists only in small blurbs in books or journals here and there. The task of finding

primary sources was especially difficult, which can be problematic for historians. Most firsthand accounts that have been discovered are either heavily protected on account of their rarity or are accounts from people who visited the community, not actual members. This is where my archaeological background really aided me in how I was going to analyze aspects of this community. In archaeology, we look at the artifacts and features left behind by humans to tell us about them. List historians, we do use literature and historic maps in addition to these artifacts. However, these are not available for all times and places. This lack of availability in literature was a factor that led me to lean on my own conclusions from what I gathered in the material world when visiting this site. Combining analysis of artifacts and the small amount of literature proved to be one of my most fruitful endeavors. I was able to reach out to Richard Spence and Linda Poynter from Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. They allowed me to tour the meetinghouse and dwelling. I got to see all of the amazing work they have been able to do over the years through the kindness of volunteer work, donations, and small grants. They had some artifacts that came directly from the White Water society as well as a number of contemporary Shaker artifacts from larger settlements. The Friends of White Water were also in the processes of restorations inside the dwelling and meeting house. These restorations involved every aspect of the surrounding architecture of the buildings. The Friends at White Water gave me a vision of what life was like at this community through their careful restoration practices and curation of items. Without my visit to the Friends of White Water, I do not think I could have produced any degree of a meaningful research thesis.

In my research, I was also lucky enough to find one book that was written by local historians on the White Water Shakers. This was the main resource from which I was able to connect my own findings and arguments. The biggest challenge I faced in this process was the fear that my thesis might end up as a recitation of this source, which is not the purpose of a thesis. However, this did not turn out to be my reality. I did use this source extensively, but I was able to use sources on Shakerism as a whole to compare and contrast ideas brought up in this book. From there, I came to my own conclusions about the significance and influence of the White Water Shakers. This study of the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm is the basis of my thesis. Additionally, another challenge I had when creating this thesis was figuring out exactly what I wanted to do with the information I found. I brainstormed for hours on the kind of thesis I wanted. I settled on a pretty traditional research thesis, but I have inspiration for future possible projects that I could adapt to many of my interests. This traditional thesis seems important to the lack of literature on this community because it may serve as a point of interest to a future curious mind who may be able to access even more information than I ever could.

The process of curating this thesis was an incredible learning experience. I had written lengthy research papers for classes before, but I had never had an experience quite like this. From the initial ideas to the final product, I had to curate my own research, themes, organization, and narrative. With a normal research paper, there are usually restrictions and rules to how it should be completed. This thesis largely had no restrictions, so it was up to me to decide all details that went into this work. This independence taught me new aspects of how difficult it is for historians to create a

**product of research. Organically coming up with one's own topics and research**

approach can be truly difficult. Everyone in the field of history wants to make a lasting contribution. That pressure can sometimes be the biggest obstacle in researching and writing. I felt an extent of that pressure in this research, which was very new to me in some ways.

Even if my thesis does not make a lasting impression on the literature of this community, it is still important. Research and academics aside, my thesis spreads the word about this underappreciated society. My final product also gives light to the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. and all of the important work that organization is doing to help conserve and restore the remaining structures in their control. Their work can help educate people in the surrounding community about the amazing history they pass by every day. The Friends at White Water can inspire future historians through their outreach with school children and public education events. If they want, they can point to my work as evidence that this community still fascinates people and that the work they are doing is seen and heard by people outside of the area.

This thesis was a very educational experience for me. I am thankful for the opportunity to create a product of which I can be proud. I hope my research serves as an example **that it is possible to do something meaningful with one's own interests. There** does not have to be any sort of groundbreaking discovery or revolutionary unearthing for a work to be significant. The simple act of telling a story keeps a memory alive. That is the importance of my Ball State Honors College Senior Research Thesis.

## Introduction

The White Water Shakers were a community in New Haven, Ohio. Their location put them as one of the western-most Shaker communities in the United States. This western locale was a factor in the deviations the White Water Shakers created in carrying out Shaker beliefs and practices. Like many topics in history, this society can be studied through the relationship of the center and the periphery. The center for American Shakerism was the location in which the first Shakers settled in the New **World during the eighteenth century**— the East Coast.<sup>1</sup> The western settlements located in the Ohio River Valley, including that of the White Water Shakers, were often established with indirect involvement by the eastern leaders. Although the relationships with eastern Shakers were present and valued, western Shaker villages constructed their own existences concurrent with Shaker ideologies.

The White Water Shakers are a people of mystery. Not much is truly known or even attributed to them, alone. They often sit in the shadow of more well-known Shaker societies such as Pleasant Hill or Union Village. Shakers as a whole have been the focus of dozens of manuscripts penned to exhaustion by fascinated historians. It is no surprise that the literature on this group is so extensive. They are arguably one of the most interesting sects of Christianity in history. They are famed for their seemingly strange rules of celibacy and methods of worship featuring song and choreographed dance, all aspects of which aided in reaching a holistic religious experience.<sup>2</sup> The Shakers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were a society that demanded self-

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A history of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 48.



sufficiency and isolation from the outside world, yet they were also one of the most financially successful and member-enticing communal groups in American history.<sup>3</sup>

The Shakers of White Water do not have dozens of publications, nor do they even receive more than a small sentence here or there in large publications. The unique adaptations forged by western Shaker societies, like the White Water Shakers, presented these communities with the tools to write own chapter in history. This thesis will uncover what makes the White Water Shakers important to the history of the Shakers and the Ohio River Valley. This text will look at the White Water Shakers in the context of history, business, technology, feminism, and architecture as these are categories by which they evolve from standard descriptions of Shakerism.

## History

The followers of Ann Lee go by many names— the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (USBCSA), the ‘Shaking Quakers’, the Shakers. Their arrival to the American colonies was in 1774, just before the Revolutionary War. This was a turbulent time in what was to become the United States of America. Despite the virtual guarantee of struggles, the **Shaker’s leader and prophet Ann Lee envisioned a life for her** people in this new land. Her story is important for understanding the expansion of her sect.

Ann Lee was born in Manchester, England. Not much is known for certainty about her background and earliest years. It is known that she had very little formal

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<sup>3</sup> Priscilla J. Brewer, “Shakers of Mother Ann Lee” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald Pitzer (Chapel Hill, NC; The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37.

education like many women of her time and was married by the age of twenty.<sup>4</sup> From burial records and accounts, it is known that Lee and her husband had no surviving children from this marriage.<sup>5</sup> This took a toll on Lee and may have been a factor in the draw towards the Shaker sect in her future. It is unclear exactly when Ann Lee found the Shakers, but it is evident that their beliefs and enthusiasm spoke to her. She began to associate with a small group of passionately religious Quakers led by tailors James and Jane Wardley.<sup>6</sup> They and their group were referred to as ‘Shaking Quakers’ because of their uncommon methodologies of and mannerisms during worship. In fact, many of the few records that exist of Ann Lee and her fellow Shakers are court documents and arrest **records for “breach of the Sabbath.”**<sup>7</sup> This disturbance was based on the phenomenon of **Shaker worship. The name “Shaker” arose from the way in which this group worshipped** with vigor. An account from the time describes a scene of the Shakers:

[W]ith a mighty trembling, under which they would express the indignation of God against all sin. At other times they were affected under the power of God, with a mighty shaking; and were occasionally exercised in the singing, shouting, or walking the floor, under the influence of spiritual signs, shoving each other about, — or swiftly passing and repassing each other, like clouds agitated by a mighty wind.<sup>8</sup>

The intensity with which this group worshipped set them apart from other Christian sects. They must have been an oddity to some, which explains the prejudice they faced in England. They faced much of the prejudice head-on, sometimes even inciting

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A search for the perfect society* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Andrews, 6.

confrontation in an attempt to draw attention to their message.<sup>9</sup> At the core of their beliefs was the notion that Christ would come again and only those who were true Believers would be extended an offer by God of heaven and peace. Jane Wardley **implored her followers to, “amend [their] lives. Repent. For the kingdom of God is at hand. The new heaven and new earth prophesied of old is about to come.”**<sup>10</sup> The Shakers believed that all other Christian and non-Christian sects of religion would not survive the second coming.<sup>11</sup> The Shakers denounced clergy and other characteristics of traditional Christianity which made them outcasts and radicals in English society. The outcast nature of the Shakers led to their exodus from England and entrance into the American colonies in search of a more tolerant setting. They first settled on the east coast and gained quite a following for a small religious sect. It is estimated that after arriving in the American colonies in 1774 with just nineteen members, the Shakers grew to over 4,000 Believers by 1850.<sup>12</sup>

According to tradition, Ann Lee foretold the expansion of Shakers to the west: **“The next** opening of the gospel will be in the southwest; it will be a great distance and **there will be a great work of God.”**<sup>13</sup> **It was only after Ann Lee’s death** that this diaspora to the western territories of America occurred. Another prominent Shaker leader, Lucy Wright, encouraged this expansion. A small group her followers consisting of John Meacham, Isaachar Bates, and Benjamin Seth Youngs leaned into the cultural

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<sup>9</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, 6.

<sup>12</sup> **Brewer, “Shakers of Mother Ann Lee” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, 37.**

<sup>13</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 57.

phenomenon of taming the American West and set out from New Lebanon, New York with an end goal of reaching the Ohio River Valley.<sup>14</sup>

Shaker ideologies spread west as members from the eastern settlements journeyed to the Ohio River Valley. The movement of the USBCSA westward coincided with the mainstream trend of expansionism in the United States. Like the mainstream society, the Shakers saw the west as an opportunity to grow and prosper. Eastern Shakers moved from home to home, town by town, relying on the hospitality of local families to gain access to communities and seed their beliefs within those communities.<sup>15</sup> The first eastern Shakers chose the site of Turtle Creek, now known as Union Village, to become one of the first western Shaker communities.<sup>16</sup> Union Village would prove to be the most important Shaker neighbor to the White Water Shaker Village.

It is important to note that there are not many readily available primary documents that tell day to day life at White Water. Most descriptions come from visitors and records from other, larger Shaker communities. The original founders of White Water Shaker Village are credited with having established the community in 1823. Many earlier Shaker communities were founded by members who were, in general, poorer farmers. It is known, however, that White Water was different in this aspect. The founding families at White Water were generally prosperous yeoman farmers who

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<sup>14</sup> Stein, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Stein, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (New York, NY; AMS Press Inc., 1971), 114.

owned land and were literate.<sup>17</sup> Some members even held public offices in their communities prior to conversion to Shaker beliefs.<sup>18</sup> It is unclear if the already established Union Village identified White Water as a branch of the Shaker community this early or if local individuals even identified as such. Nevertheless, it is known that White Water largely has Miriam Agnew to thank for its birth. Her discovery of the Shaker faith drove her to reach out to Union Village leaders to learn more.<sup>19</sup> The beliefs and support she brought back from a visit there in 1823 were the catalyst for the creation of White Water as a recognized Shaker community. Miriam and her husband, Joseph, invited a Shaker preacher to give a service at their barn and interest by the community grew. Miriam invited her three brothers and one sister, as well as her mother to join the faith.<sup>20</sup> In early summer of 1823, the community boasted a membership of thirty.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, no original list of members exists into modern times, but the family names of McKee, Boggett, and Agnew are known to have all had members.

Union Village was a great help to those early members of White Water. The founding of White Water was similar to Union Village in that there was no central donated farmstead that served as a hub for all new members.<sup>22</sup> Instead, biological families tended to stay together in the houses they owned prior to pledging every possession to the Shaker way of life until proper buildings and more land could be

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<sup>17</sup> James R. Innis Jr., and Thomas Sakmyster, **“A History of White Water Shaker Village”** in *The Shakers of White Water, Ohio, 1823-1916* (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, **“A History of White Water Shaker Village”**, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 16.

purchased or donated.<sup>23</sup> Union Village took a parental-like interest in this new community. The leaders at Union Village decided in 1823 to merge a struggling community of seventy-eight Believers at Darby Plains, Ohio with the Believers at White Water.<sup>24</sup> This increase in membership caused problems for the Shakers at White Water as space was limited and disease followed the newcomers.<sup>25</sup> The large number of newcomers also caused tension with the non-Shakers of the area and vandalism occurred from time to time.<sup>26</sup> Food was in short supply and by 1824, Union Village stepped in to support the small community and continued to support them until they could be self-sufficient.<sup>27</sup> A popular quote used to describe early conditions at White Water is, “**It was Lent with them nearly all the year round.**”<sup>28</sup> A small number of members chose to leave, but the ones that stuck it out eventually saw an overall prosperous life.

Union Village took over control of the financial aspects of White Water during this time. Union Village representatives sent livestock, food supplies, and positive spirits to the people of White Water to aid in stabilization.<sup>29</sup> Leaders were appointed, and White Water began to slowly rise from the sickly community that it once was. More land was purchased, and the Shakers at White Water introduced their own industries to those previously established by Union Village leaders. The Shakers who lived at White

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<sup>23</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 17.

<sup>28</sup> J.P. MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio. Fugitive Papers Concerning Shakers of Ohio, With Unpublished Manuscripts* (Columbus, OH; F.J. Heer, 1907), 236.

<sup>29</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, “**A History**”, 17.

Water grew along the outskirts of New Haven, Ohio. They built their own permanent dwellings, barns, shops, stables, and a meeting house (Figures 1-3). When they were back on their feet, Union Village gave them control of their finances, but continued to support them spiritually.

## Business and Manufacturing

The businesses and manufactured goods of the Shakers were known around the country for their impeccable quality.<sup>30</sup> Shakers entered industries in agriculture and manufacturing of specialized goods. Despite the disapproval for the people and the evils of **‘the world,’** Shakers in every community engaged in commerce with **‘the world.’** They often came to rely on goods produced in **‘the world’** when supplies of their own fell short in times of bad harvest or ill-preparation. Most Shaker communities were largely self-sufficient, yet still chose to have an open economic relationship with the outside world. Of course, this was on a community basis and not an individual basis due to their communal property laws.<sup>31</sup> The **irony of the Shakers’ business ventures with the outside world** can be seen at **the faith’s** very core as the religious ideology of the Believers supposedly forbade such interaction. The Shaker religious tradition called for a strict separation from **‘the world’** and a fundamental focus on self-sufficiency.<sup>32</sup> This, although seemingly ideologically pure and true, was not the wholesome and realistic truth of the Shakers. It proved to be impossible to cut out the already well established world around each Shaker community. It is important to note that this fact made each Shaker village

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<sup>30</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Stein, 133.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, 135.

interact with **‘the world’** and its people in different ways. The White Water Shakers are an incredible example of this necessary relationship with **‘the world’** in an economic way.

The White Water Shakers are known to have been successful in many of their business ventures. The apex economic stability of White Water should largely be attributed to closely knit ties to Union Village. Union Village was a governing body of White Water and its finances in its formative years as a community.<sup>33</sup> Union Village helped to establish the community, build dwellings, and find ways to secure the social and financial tensions in the early days. Their isolation from the eastern Shaker societies, meant that the White Water Shakers needed spiritual guidance to keep them as close to the societies of the east as possible.

The Shakers at White Water were involved in several traditional and non-traditional forms of business. The traditional forms of business undertaken by the White Water Shakers were the manufacturing of brooms, bonnets, and garden seeds.<sup>34</sup> All three of these common Shaker industries were most likely introduced or inspired by the Union Village Shakers when they helped the first settlement at White Water stay afloat socially and financially in the formative years.<sup>35</sup> The earliest and possibly most profitable of these industries was the broom manufacturing. After the brethren learned this trade, they began to sell these quality brooms to the people of **‘the world.’**<sup>36</sup> This economic endeavor helped to grow the White Water Shakers not only financially, but

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<sup>33</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, **“A History”**, 24.

<sup>34</sup> James R. Innis Jr, and Thomas Sakmyster, **“Agriculture and Industry”** in *The Shakers of White Water, Ohio, 1823-1916* (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2014), 193.

<sup>35</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, **“Agriculture and Industry”**, 193.

<sup>36</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 193.



also socially with ‘**the world**’ communities of New Haven and Harrison.<sup>37</sup> It is believed that the brooms could have been sold by itinerant salesmen in and around the greater Cincinnati area, or even more distant than that.<sup>38</sup> Few financial documents are available, however the ones that are present in the record, list a profit of at least 1,000 percent in 1852-54.<sup>39</sup> Shaker broom-making is an activity that the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. showcase in public outreach programs and events, today.

The second most lucrative industry at White Water was the garden seed industry.<sup>40</sup> This traditional Shaker business also must have followed the Union Valley model in its earliest of years, but according to records this industry was self-sufficient and actively in public markets by at least 1829.<sup>41</sup> According to two White Water Village **historians, Thomas Sakmyster and James Innis, Jr., “ A full-fledged regional garden seed industry with sales throughout the American West was previously thought to have been started only in 1847, but in fact itinerant White Water seed merchants probably began to ply their trade at some point in the 1830s”.**<sup>42</sup> The few remaining documents and manuscripts from White Water also support this theory of an early extensive garden seed market, eventually exceeding and/or matching larger settlements like Pleasant Hill and South Union in Kentucky.<sup>43</sup> Their easy access to the Ohio River also likely put the

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<sup>37</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 193.

<sup>39</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>41</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>42</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>43</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 195.

White Water Shaker seed industry as the nearest and most prominent Shaker garden seed supplier of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and other western states.<sup>44</sup>

The seed industry did not stop there. It is also known that the White Water community sold fruits and vegetables from their orchards and gardens for profit.<sup>45</sup> The cultivation of unique strains of apples only ever seen in White Water was especially popular, but varieties of strawberries, currents, raspberries, gooseberries, and cherries were all jarred, used, and sold to the public when surplus was available.<sup>46</sup> Other horticultural sales included occasional maple syrup and honey, as a few keen brethren became skilled beekeepers.<sup>47</sup>

Livestock was not often sold to the public with exception of necessity or surplus and was largely only used by the Shakers, themselves. For a few years in the earlier periods of White Water history, swine was raised and sold to market quite profitably.<sup>48</sup> The regional importance of pork to Cincinnati (nicknamed ‘Porkopolis’) was probably the reason that this was one of the only livestock industries actively run by the White Water Shakers. **Pork was declared “cursed and unclean” and** therefore unfit for Believer consumption or cultivation by the Ministry at New Lebanon in 1841.<sup>49</sup> The White Water Shakers did cease to breed swine after some time following this decree, selling what was left to people of **‘the world.’** However, the White Water Shakers slowly and minimally revived their interest in swine production in the 1850s and 1870s.<sup>50</sup> This continuation of

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<sup>44</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194-5.

<sup>45</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 195.

<sup>46</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 195.

<sup>48</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 196.

<sup>49</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 196.

<sup>50</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 196-7.

a forbidden industry directly went against eastern Ministry orders, but never seemed to get the Believers at White Water in any trouble.

All agricultural work and economic industries were run by the brethren of the Shaker societies. However, sisters adopted a few minorly lucrative industries that also helped financially support the community and helped it gain better social relationships with **‘the world.’** The sisters at White Water engaged in both bonnet making and silk cultivation. Bonnet making was a traditional business as well as a necessity for Shaker sisters. Bonnet making was probably once again learned from the sisters at Union Village, but the process was soon streamlined and bonnets from White Water sisters were on market by at least 1860 in the town of Harrison, just a few miles away.<sup>51</sup> It is known that this was one of the few industries on which brethren and sisters collaborated. Brethren forged the machinery and molds necessary for the sisters to complete the task.<sup>52</sup>

Silkworm cultivation was an especially rare and unique industry that the sisters and Shaker children undertook.<sup>53</sup> Mulberry trees for silkworm consumption were grown in the agricultural lands around White Water. The sisters and children set to work in what was described by a visiting Tennessee agronomist as **“two log cabins” and “a garden house”**<sup>54</sup> utilized for the purposed of silk farming. The business was not extremely lucrative, yielding only about \$275 in annual income in its best years.<sup>55</sup> Although not entirely a staple in the White Water commerce circuit, the production of

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<sup>51</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>52</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 194.

<sup>53</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 197.

<sup>54</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 197.

<sup>55</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 198.

silk allowed the sisters of the community to have a direct role in business with brethren in an otherwise separated world. The operation was damaged by lightning in 1885 and was then ceased.<sup>56</sup>

The most unique industry undertaken at White Water was the brewery of hard cider and beer. For as strict as the Shaker religious tradition and the original Millennial Laws of 1821 seem, it would appear unlikely that any such brewery would ever exist in Shaker culture. Despite this, a brewery did exist at White Water and it was open to **‘the world.’** There eventually was a prohibition of alcohol by Shaker leaders in 1842 but prior to that ban, the brewery thrived at White Water for both private and commercial use.<sup>57</sup> The brew house was one of the first buildings raised at White Water in 1832.<sup>58</sup> The **brewery’s existence** is not the only fascinating part of this business. It is the relationship that the brewery allowed with external people of **‘the world’** that draws an interesting dynamic with tradition. The brewery gained a rather notorious reputation for attracting the worst kinds of people from surrounding towns. Isaac Newton Youngs, a visitor at White Water, detailed the scene he encountered outside of the brewery:

They make considerable extensive business brewing malt beer, generally about fourteen barrels a week; here is a pack of rude fellows of the world who had got **together in the shade of the brewery house, & were shooting a mark, & said “they were shooting for beer;” one of them came in & told aged Joseph, they wanted a gallon of beer; but I did not stay to see whether they got any or not.**<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 199.

<sup>57</sup> Innis and Sakmyster, 197.

<sup>58</sup> **Richard B. Spence, “Village Buildings” in *The Shakers of White Water, Ohio, 1823-1916*** (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2014), 249.

<sup>59</sup> Glendyne R. Wergland, *One Shaker Life: Isaac Newton Youngs, 1793-1865* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 85.

The clientele that was apparently drawn to the brewery was not the type of people that the Ministry of the east would have allowed. It is unclear if the Shakers at White Water ever had any trouble with their brewery customers because very few accounts survive.

Business with **‘the world’** became an integral part of Shaker society, not only at White Water, but also all over the country. The irony of creating a whole religion based on self-sufficiency and isolation only to have some of the most successful widespread commerce and manufacturing in the country is not lost on historians of the Shakers. The Shakers at White Water seem to be no different when it comes to this irony. However, the Village at White Water was founded forty years after the death of the famed leader Ann Lee. It cannot be ignored that this late founding in the western most part of the country as it was back then may have contributed to the seemingly relaxed upholding of strict Shaker standards curated in the eastern communities.

## Feminism

The USBCSA had a unique approach to the roles of and relationships between the sexes. This approach is the center of much intrigue in the fields of history and communal studies. The Millennial Laws of 1821 set forth official standards for the separation of the sexes in its very first clause:

### I. Separation of the Sexes

Contrary to order

to give the cooks any directions;  
 for brethren and sisters to milk together;  
 for a brother and sister to eat at one table, unless there is some company;  
 for men and women to sleep together;  
 for a brother and sister to be a room together without company;  
 for a brother to pass a sister on the stairs;  
**to go into the sisters’ room without knocking:**

**for a sister to got to the brothers' shop alone;**  
 for a sister to go to the barn, wood-house or road alone:  
**for the brethren and sisters to go into each other's rooms after evening**  
 meeting;  
 for brethren and sisters to talk together in the halls;  
**for brethren to sing or smoke in the sisters' shop;**  
 for brethren to shake hands or touch the sisters, and vice versa;  
**to shake hands with a 'world's woman' without confessing it;**  
 for the brethren to many any presents to the sisters;  
 for the brethren to go into the room when the sisters are making the  
 beds.<sup>60</sup>

This strict standard of living set forth by the Elders and Eldresses of the eastern United States heavily impacted the lives of all Shakers. These strict rules detail every aspect of life and force conformity for women. However, these same rules also force conformity of men in an equivalent capacity. The Separation of the Sexes clause may be the reason some women were drawn to the Shaker lifestyle in its heyday. The strict standards were set for men and women equally, and therefore, they had to be followed by everyone. The Millennial Laws not only gave purpose to men and women, but also gave protection and rights to men and women alike.

Equality among the Shakers was not what modern standards of equality may dictate. Men and women did not always have the opportunity to do the same tasks, but each had their own tasks that were equally important in the community. The Separation of the Sexes clause in the Millennial Laws meant that each sex was equally important in **doing the Lord's work** and contributing to Shaker society. However, gender roles and norms were bound by the era. The brethren were considered to be the laborers, agriculturalists, and artisans.<sup>61</sup> The sisters were the textile experts, cooks, and

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<sup>60</sup> Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 244.

<sup>61</sup> Brewer, "Shakers of Mother Ann Lee", 44.

manufacturers of some sale items like silk, candy, bonnets, and sewing notions.<sup>62</sup> The **important difference between this society's gender roles and the outside society's gender roles is that men's roles were not more prestigious or more powerful than the roles of women.** Each sex had jobs that were equally as important as the other. This type of **equality was vastly different from the outside world's patriarchal tendencies.**

Additionally, aside from the equal roles of members, there was also equality in representation and influence of the governing in Shaker society. Women were present as **Eldresses to a man's Elder and Deaconesses to a man's Deacon. Both roles were in the** respected power hierarchy of Shaker life. The roles of each equal party were to represent the associated female and male opinions in the governing of the community. Having the opportunity to have equal representation and equal voice in the governing of a community was not a luxury afforded to women of **'the world.'**

The life of most women in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century **was bleak compared to today's standards. Married women were expected to vastly be** uneducated housewives in charge of cooking and cleaning in the household and rearing large quantities of children they birthed. If they were poor, single, or a minority, women found jobs in factories, mills, or in agriculture in addition to their domestic roles. If they were wealthy, they may have hired help and had an education, but they were still fully expected to live entirely in the domestic sphere of society. The psychological and physical toll of childbirth and exiling domesticity can only be imagined. The lack of available room to grow oneself can be seen in these limiting social standards of the time.

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<sup>62</sup> Brewer, 44.

Even in that era, not all women could see their lives controlled by their fertility and cleaning skills. Some women who were fed up with the pressures of childbirth and domesticity may have sought refuge in the celibate and equally distributed taskings of Shakerism. For some tired women, Shakerism may have been the perfect escape from the burdens of society. Mother Ann Lee lost all four of her children that she birthed in four years after her marriage to Abraham Stanley.<sup>63</sup> These terrible losses may have taken a toll on Lee and brought her to the belief that God did not support this type of union between men and women.<sup>64</sup> Her solace came with her discovery of the four tenets of Shakerism: celibacy, communalism, confession of sin, and separation from the outside world.<sup>65</sup> This revelation by Lee led to her membership in the Shaker society and her eventual rise to leadership within the religion. Her power and influence in Shakerism allowed her to be an incredible influence on other women in the community and ‘the world.’

There is suspicion that this trend of women fleeing the outside world in favor of a peaceful life in Shakerism can be seen in the White Water community. Very few documents remain that were written by the women of White Water, but it is known that they were demographically dominant at White Water.<sup>66</sup> These women played important roles in the history of this community from its founding to its demise and every day in between. The founding of White Water is largely accredited to Miriam Agnew who was

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<sup>63</sup> Brewer, 39.

<sup>64</sup> Brewer, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Brewer, 38.

<sup>66</sup> **Lindy Cummings, “Women” in *The Shakers of White Water, Ohio, 1823-1916*** (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2014), 173.



the wife of Joseph Agnew and mother to a deceased infant son prior to Shakerism. Her interests in Shakerism are not explicitly known, but her life leading up to her entrance into the religion could be likened to the journey that Mother Ann Lee took several decades earlier.

Prior to life at White Water, women played the roles of widows, wives, and daughters.<sup>67</sup> It can only be imagined that these women led the same domestic lives as the average women of the day with perhaps only **a rural setting's twist**. Expectations of high childbirth rates and sometimes equally as high infant mortality rates had to have an impact on the mental states of women in this era.<sup>68</sup> Lindy Cummings, an author on **the subject of women at White Water states that the society became, “a place where** women could find respite during the most fragile times of their lives: during their fertile years, during periods of personal or financial hardships, and as they reached advanced **years.”**<sup>69</sup> Some female children brought in by mothers and fathers chose to stay in this community, perhaps because they never knew better, but also perhaps because there was nowhere better for them. Other women who joined stayed only for a time and left to rejoin **‘the world.’** Reasons for joining and leaving were different for each woman, but **every woman at White Water was key to the society's survival and influence on Shaker** history.

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<sup>67</sup> Cummings, “Women”, 173.

<sup>68</sup> Cummings, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Cummings, 174.

## Architecture

Shaker architecture has been the focus of dozens of modern books and artistic inspiration. The reason for this fascination may stem from the idea that architecture of Shaker villages directly impacted their lives. The structures and dwellings of many Shaker societies were standardized directly by their religious texts. The Millennial Laws of 1821 were **the Shaker's first attempt at homogenizing and regulating their faith with** over 125 written rules about almost every aspect of day to day life.<sup>70</sup> These laws included elements of architecture and design. In a majority of the architecture, the Shakers of White Water upheld these laws and regulations. However, there are several important ways in which these Shakers of the west diverted from the seemingly strict criterions of building. Of these diversions, the most interesting and unique was the choice to build the meeting house at White Water out of brick instead of the typical medium of wood. The meeting house of the White Water Shakers was built in 1827 on what was then **known as the Center Family's section** of White Water.<sup>71</sup> The meeting house is currently the only surviving meeting house of the Shakers who lived in Ohio and Indiana.<sup>72</sup>

It is unclear if the governing Shakers of the east ever disapproved of the construction materials of this meeting house, but it is clearly stated in the Millennial **Laws of 1821 that, "[o]dd and fanciful styles of architecture, may not be used among** Believers, neither should any deviate widely from the common styles of buildings among **Believers, without the union of the Ministry".<sup>73</sup> These laws also state: "The meeting**

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<sup>70</sup> Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 95.

<sup>71</sup> Julie Nicoletta, *The Architecture of the Shakers* (Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, Inc., 1995), 43.

<sup>72</sup> **Spence, "Village Buildings"**, 244.

<sup>73</sup> Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 285.

house should be painted white without, and a bluish shade within”.<sup>74</sup> The building maintains its original red-orange shade from the hand-made bricks that are untraditional in this society (Figure 1). The meeting house at White Water is also the only brick-exterior meeting house known in Shaker history within the United States.<sup>75</sup> The meeting house at White Water is also extremely unique in its physical placement within the community. In 1855, a farm was purchased by the community to the south of the village.<sup>76</sup> This new acquisition changed the layout and labelling of parts of the society. The new farm became known as the South Family. There was a previously named “South Family”, but that then became the Center Family. The previous “Center Family” also had to change its labelling to the North Family. The meeting house was then located in the North Family’s sector of buildings. This is an important distinction from the norms of Shaker villages because the meeting house was supposed to be a central location for all members of a community to come together. Adding the newly named South Family farm placed the meeting house at White Water in the northern most section of the village. It may not have been feasible for the White Water Shakers to build a new meeting house on their newly ascribed Center Family lands. These differences from mainstream Shaker society of the east are what distinguish the White Water Shakers further as a new type of Shaker of the west.

Some of the interior design of the White Water meeting house is also thought to have differed greatly from the standards of Shaker building traditions. Small variations

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<sup>74</sup> Andrews, 285.

<sup>75</sup> Nicoletta, *The Architecture of the Shakers*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Nicoletta, 43.

in the use and construction of the building include the presence of transoms, movable benches, and a usable cellar.<sup>77</sup> **There was also no elder's viewing window like there are in** other Shaker meeting houses.<sup>78</sup> A major change from the eastern attempts at standardization of Shaker buildings was the interior coloring of the White Water meeting house. The Millennial Laws of 1821 explicitly state that the interior of a meeting **house should be painted with a soft "bluish"**<sup>79</sup> color. The Shakers of White Water deviated immensely from this standard when they chose to paint the interior paneling and wainscot with a deep red-ochre color.<sup>80</sup> Current conservation efforts by the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. uncovered this curious trend in the restoration of the meeting house. No currently known documents relay information about the reason for this deviation from the norm, but it can be inferred that the Shakers of White Water had their own visions of their community and most likely used whichever materials were readily available to them at the time.

## Current Conservation

The importance of the White Water Shakers can be seen in the current conservation efforts that are being undertaken by the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. This volunteer-based organization sees the importance of the White Water Shakers on local and regional levels. It was through their kindness and interest that this thesis was written. Almost everything that is known or theorized about the White Water Shakers originates in their researched discoveries and published scholarship. Their

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<sup>77</sup> Spence, "Village Buildings", 244.

<sup>78</sup> Spence, 244.

<sup>79</sup> Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 285.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Spence (President of FWWSV) in conversation with the author, March 2019.

efforts of conservation and uncovering more about this unique group continues to the present.

Current conservation efforts are focused on eleven structures of the North Family. The original structures are currently owned by the Great Parks of Hamilton County and have been leased to the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. since 2007.<sup>81</sup> The Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. have been successful in modernizing the property for current and future visitors use. They have installed a modern restroom in the North Family Dwelling and have repaired floors, restored walls, fixed staircases, and added wiring to both the Dwelling and the Meeting House. Conservation and restoration efforts are ongoing as the Friends attempt to maintain and increase funding and community interest. They are constantly seeking financial grants to continue **their work at this site. The Friends' long term plans for the White Water** Village include the building of a parking lot, walkways, exterior lighting, and other code requirements. They are in need of skilled volunteers like carpenters, masonry professionals, architects, and historians to continue the restoration of structures.

The Friends of White Water also seek help finding original White Water manuscripts, documents, photographs, artifacts, and furnishings. The Friends have done a remarkable job at gaining original Shaker materials to stage certain rooms in the Dwelling to replicate scenes that may have been part of the day to day White Water Shaker life (Figure 4). Despite their best efforts, they have few original furniture pieces and artifacts from White Water. They have filled display rooms with generous donations

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Spence (President of FWWSV) in conversation with the author, March 2019.

of other Shaker village material from local people. These non-White Water pieces still aid in education and restoration, so they are still accepted and greatly appreciated.

Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. is an Ohio non-profit corporation that aims to restore and preserve the buildings in their care.<sup>82</sup> The Great Parks of Hamilton County do not take a direct role in the operation. Their main responsibility in the restoration is to make sure that state and local ordinances and regulations are met.<sup>83</sup> The Parks were responsible for the acquisition and stabilization of the structures; however, the restoration and management of these building lies exclusively with Friends of White Water Village, Inc. They aim to open the site to the public for education and tours. The Friends of White Water Shaker Village largely rely on private donations and membership fees for income.<sup>84</sup> Donations and membership fees help to cover the operational costs of the project like utilities, insurance, member events, newsletters, and other small building updates. They acquire small grants when possible to aid in restoration and public outreach, but mainly rely on the kindness of volunteers and specialists to continue their work.<sup>85</sup> Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. is an incredible organization run by passionate and genuine people. Their conservation efforts are run by a small working board who volunteer their time and energy to keeping the memory of the White Water Shakers alive.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Spence (President of FWWSV) in conversation with the author, March 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Linda Poynter (Board Member of FWWSV) in conversation with the author, March 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Spence (President of FWWSV) in email correspondence with the author, April 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Spence (President of FWWSV) in conversation with the author, March 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Please visit [www.whitewatervillage.org](http://www.whitewatervillage.org) to learn more about this organization.

## Conclusion

The White Water Shaker Village is essential to study when looking at Shakerism and its reach in the United States. Unfortunately, the information on these innovative people is not extensive. They are often missed in the larger scope of Shaker studies and become generalized with the more sizable communities that once surrounded them. Thankfully, there is ongoing research by local historians and organizations to highlight this community and their impact on the definition of Shakerism. This text presented the White Water Shakers as being on the periphery of Shakerdom and what that means to the common description of Shaker communities. The unique deviations from the Shaker norm that White Water members pursued are evident in their history, business practices, underlying feminism, and distinctive architecture. The White Water USBCSA community exemplifies the importance of the microcosm on the macrocosm in Shaker history.

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## Appendix A: Images and Photographs



Figure 1: *The Meeting House in White Water Shaker Village, New Haven Ohio*, photograph taken by Jose Kozaan, National Park Service 2018.



Figure 2: A photograph depicting the modern North family dwelling (right) and the modern meetinghouse (Left), photograph taken by Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc., 2019.

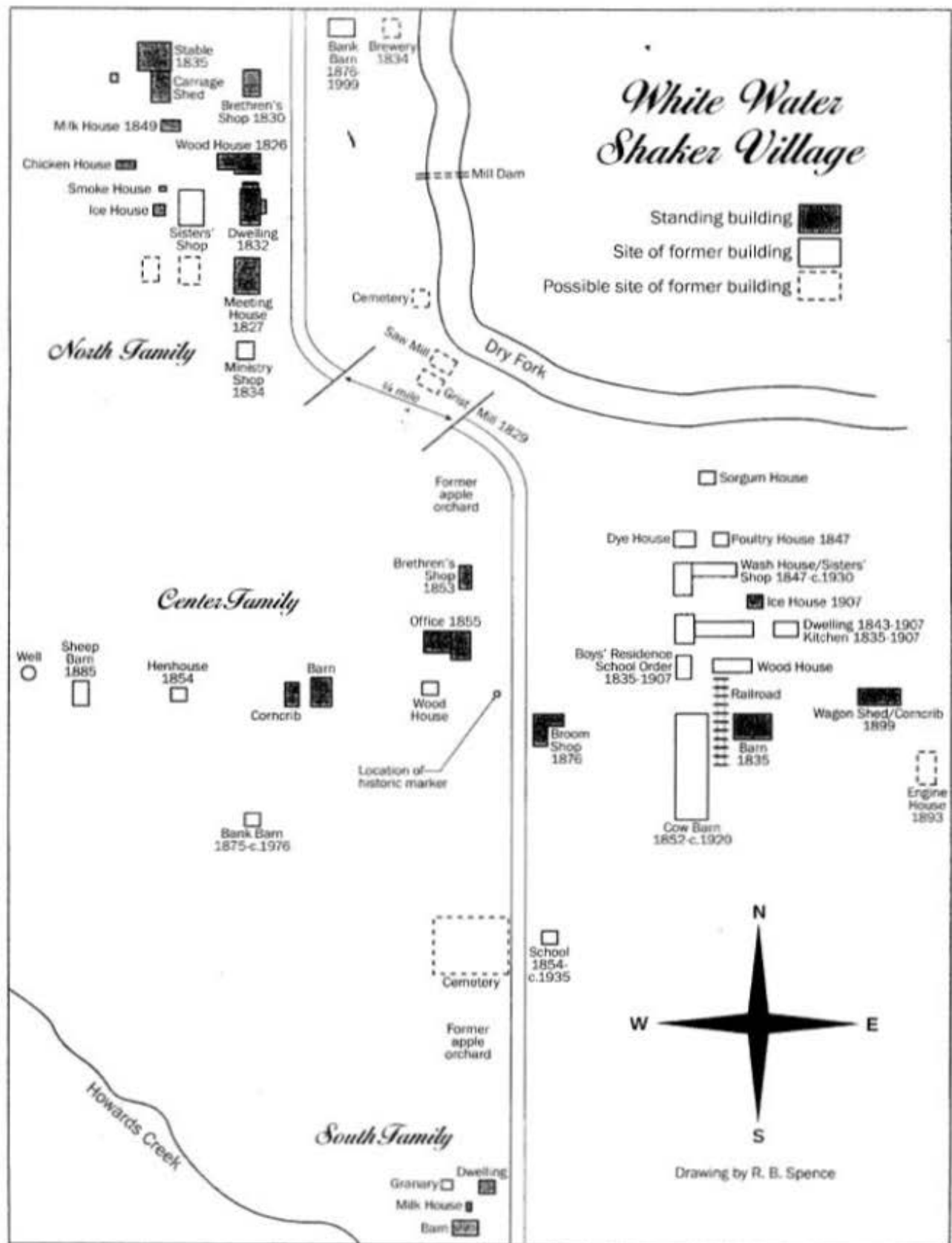


Figure 3: "Figure 6- White Water Shaker Village." Map depicting the estimated and current locations of White Water structures, drawn by Richard Spence in *Historic Structures Report: White Water Shaker Village Center Family Trustees Office*, 10.





*Figure 4: A photograph depicting a staged room by Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. complete with authentic Shaker furnishings and accurate recreations, photograph taken by the author, March 2019.*